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FREESTYLE

A PAGE BY, FOR AND ABOUT TEENS!

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Teens fight the winter blues

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Invariably, there will be boredom during the winter months.

Many teens may not deal with it directly; there's always something else to get in the way, be it school work, part-time jobs, sports or hanging out with friends. But there's always the misery of being cooped up inside. And as of late, it's been particularly miserable —the weather is bitterly cold and windy, and there's not even any snow to make up for it.

What to do?

"I just try and stay as warm as possible and avoid going outside because it's freezing," Elizabethtown senior Caitlin Wilson said. "I have also been reading a lot of books."

Many people are plagued by seasonal affective disorder, also called winter blues or seasonal depression, during this time of year. The U.S. National Library of Medicine has said that "some people experience a serious mood change when the seasons change. They may sleep too much, have little energy, and may also feel depressed. Though symptoms can be severe, they usually clear up."

Long discounted by skeptics, seasonal affective disorder has now been diagnosed as a common mood disorder. It is a fact that mood and personality play a large role in identifying a patient with it. But would there be a biological factor in the disorder as well?

"Our levels of serotonin, a mood-elevating chemical, drop in the winter months, causing us to feel down," *telegraph.co.uk* stated in an article. "Scientists from the Center for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, Canada, have found that as the days become shorter we produce high levels of a protein which interferes with serotonin. The protein is a serotonin transporter, which helps the "happy" chemical to flow around the brain. When this protein becomes more active in the winter, it soaks up the serotonin that lies between our brain cells, causing levels to fall."

Cate Shipley, 16/Freestyle Staff photos

Fight the winter blues by baking brownies, like 16-year-old Penn Manor High School students Stacy Tomaszfski, left, and Erin Patterson.

Penn Manor High School students Erin Patterson, 16, and Andrew Glick, 17, fight the cold with coffee at Prince Street Cafe.

There are many treatments, such as antidepressant medication and light therapy, but those would be some of the more drastic measures. There are far more fun ways to combat the winter blues, such as focusing on New Year's resolutions, relaxing with friends and family, or even a teen favorite, sleeping.

Elizabethtown Area High School senior Meghan Kreider prefers a similar option.

"I've been watching a lot of movies on my laptop. I won't even get off of my futon," she said. "It's sad, but I live in my 'man cave,' as I like to call it, and stay under the covers."

And good news for coffee lovers: Time Magazine states that, "a recent analysis of data from the massive Nurses' Health Study found that women who drank more than four cups of coffee a day had a 20 percent lower risk of depression than women who drank less. The research did not include men but there's little reason to suspect a wildly different effect in them."

Feelgooder.com offers meeting new people and socializing with old friends as good options to avoiding the doldrums of winter. Another way to beat the boredom, suggested Elizabethown junior Amanda Matta, is trying different activities.

"I've been doing a lot of strange things I wouldn't normally do," Matta said. "Like yesterday, I came home from school, baked chocolate chip cookies, polished my riding boots, then watched two hours of 'Big Bang Theory.' And ate a lot of cookies."

So if the keys to happiness during the winter months can be obtained through activity, exposure to bright lights, socializing, relaxing, eating cookies and drinking coffee, it would seem relatively simple to keep from falling into seasonal affective disorder. Personal motivation plays a key role, and in the end, it is all up to the individual.

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